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Black Women in Presidential Administrations



Presented by Billy R. Glasco, Archivist

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A Century of Political Excellence

- Mary McLeod Bethune
- Patricia Roberts Harris
- Hazel R. O'Leary
- Alexis Herman
- Condoleeza Rice
- Loretta Lynch
- Kamala Harris

Right: Copies of the Energy Report resting on the table in the Cabinet Room (White House/David Bohrer)



Mary Mcleod Bethune (1875-1955)

- President, Bethune-Cookman College
- Appointed Presidential Advisor of African American Affairs to Franklin D. Roosevelt
- Forms Federal Council of Negro Affairs (later known as The Black Cabinet)
- Instrumental in creating 300,000 black jobs in federal executive departments & New Deal agencies during Great Depression

Right: Portrait of Mary Mcleod Bethune (National Archives Identifier: [559194](#))



Mary Mcleod Bethune



- Advocate for fair salary & job opportunities as Director of Negro Affairs, National Youth Administration
- Member of U.S. delegation that created United Nations charter
- Only African American to hold leadership positions in Women's Auxiliary Corps

Left: Mary McLeod Bethune with Eleanor Roosevelt (National Archives Identifier: [533032](#))

Patricia Roberts Harris (1924-1985)

- Graduates with honors from Howard University
- Earns law degree from George Washington University Law School
- Appointed co-chairman of National Women's Committee on Civil Rights, 1963
- Appointed by Johnson as Ambassador to Luxembourg, 1965

Right: Official portrait of former Secretary Patricia Roberts Harris, 5/30/2008 (National Archives Identifier: [7316017](#))



Patricia Roberts Harris

- Chairman, Credentials Committee & Member-at-Large w/DNC, 1972-73
- Appointed Secretary of H.U.D. by Carter, 1977; first African-American woman in line of succession to Presidency
- Serves as Secretary of Health, Education & Welfare, 1979

Left: Secretary of H.U.D. Patricia Roberts Harris, Jimmy Carter, and New York Mayor Abraham Beame tour the South Bronx, 10/5/1977 (National Archives Identifier: [176392](#))

Hazel O'Leary (b. 1937)

- Graduate of Fisk University, Rutgers Law School
- During Carter Administration, appointed as:
 - Assistant Administrator, Federal Energy Administration
 - Administrator, Economic Regulatory Administration (Dept. of Energy)
- Vice-President & General Counsel, O'Leary & Associates
- Executive Vice-President, Northern States Power Company (Minnesota)



Right: Photograph of former Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary ([Department of Energy](#))

Hazel O'Leary



- Nominated by Clinton, becomes first woman & African American to serve as Secretary of Energy, 1993
- Declassified DOE Cold War records revealing secret radiation testing on U.S. citizens
- Prompts creation of Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments (ACHRE); \$4.6 million settlement reached with victims' families

Left: Photograph of President William J. Clinton greeting Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary after an Earth Day speech, 4/21/1993 (National Archives Identifier: [2253902](#))

Alexis Herman (b. 1947)

- Alabama Native, graduate of Xavier University
- Worked as social worker advocating for training of unskilled black workers in Mississippi Gulf Coast shipyards
- Director, Southern Regional Council's Black Women's Employment Program
- Appointed by Carter as Director, Labor Department's Women's Bureau

Right: Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman in El Paso, Texas, 8/26/1997 (National Archives Identifier: [39005751](#))



Alexis Herman



- Manages Jesse Jackson's 1984 & 1988 Presidential campaigns
- Chief of Staff to DNC Chair Ron Brown
- Vice-Chair of DNC, 1992
- Appointed Deputy Director of Presidential Transition Office by Clinton
- As Director of White House Office of the Public Liaison, builds strong relationship w/NAACP, Congressional Black Caucus (CBC)

Left: President William J. Clinton meeting with Black Women's Leadership Group, including Maya Angelou, Dorothy Height, Delores Tucker, Alexis Herman, and Maggie Williams in the Oval Office, 6/29/1993 (National Archives Identifier: [2569276](#))

Alexis Herman



- Uses political position to garner support for passage of Clinton's North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
- Becomes first African American Secretary of Labor
- Successfully mediates United Parcel Service Worker's Strike of 1997
- Works to increase the minimum wage

Left: President William J. Clinton posing for an official portrait with Cabinet and Senior Advisors, 6/29/2000 (National Archives Identifier: [2678706](#))

Condoleezza Rice (b. 1954)

- Alabama Native inspired by parents & witnessing civil injustice in South
- Attains Bachelors & PhD from University of Denver; Masters from Notre Dame
- Special Assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986
- Director, Soviet & East Europe Affairs in National Security Council, 1989-1991

Right: Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg swears in Dr. Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State, 1/28/2005
(National Archives Identifier: [171487271](#))



Condoleezza Rice



- Named National Security Advisor, 2000; key player in global war on terror
- Receives U.S. Senator John Heinz Award for Greatest Public Service by an Elected Official, 2003
- Confirmed as first African American woman to serve as Secretary of State, 2005
- Receives U.S. Air Force Academy's Thomas D. White National Defense Award

Left: (Clockwise), U.S. President George W. Bush, Donald H. Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of Defense, Condoleezza Rice, U.S. National Security Advisor, and U.S. Vice President Richard B. Cheney, attends a briefing at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., on Aug. 1, 2001. (National Archives Identifier: [6680796](#)/DoD photo by Helene C. Stikkel)

Loretta Lynch



- Inspired by parents' civic engagement, graduates from Shaw University & later Harvard Law School
- Nominated as Chief Assistant U.S. Attorney, Eastern District of New York & later Chief U.S. Attorney by Clinton
- Oversaw prosecution of NYPD officers for murder of Abner Louima
- Personally met w/family of Eric Garner, victim of police officer

Left: President Barack Obama meets with Attorney General Loretta Lynch in the Oval Office, 4/27/2015
(National Archives Identifier: [183898198](#))

Kamala Harris (b. 1964)



President Barack Obama Holds a Meeting on Criminal Justice in the Roosevelt Room of the White House (National Archives Identifier: [200283701](#))

- Graduate of Howard University & University of California College of Law
- District Attorney for Alameda County, CA
- Elected District Attorney for San Francisco, CA in 2003
- **First woman, African American, & South Asian American elected as:**
 - Attorney General of California (2010)
 - U.S. Senator (2016)
 - Vice President of the United States (2020)





Further Inquiry

Official Personnel Folder for Mary McLeod Bethune (National Archives Identifier: [158329664](#))

Patricia Roberts Harris: A Higher Standard ([National Museum of African American History & Culture](#))

Finding Aid: Records Regarding Hazel O'Leary in Her Position as Secretary of Energy ([Clinton Digital Library](#))

Finding Aid: Alexis Herman ([Clinton Digital Library](#))

Records on Iraq within the Condoleezza Rice Files between 01/2001 & 03/2003 ([George W. Bush Library](#))

Remarks by the President at Investiture Ceremony for Attorney General Loretta Lynch ([The White House](#))

Vice Presidential Nomination Acceptance Democratic National Convention Speech ([PBS News Hour](#))



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President William J. Clinton posing with members of his administration at the Congressional Black Caucus Dinner at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC. Pictured from left to right: Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy, and U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, 1993 (National Archives Identifier: [3598926](#))

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